

First record of Franklin's Gull *Leucophaeus pipixcan* for Ghana

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Première observation de la Mouette de Franklin *Leucophaeus pipixcan* au Ghana. Une Mouette de Franklin *Leucophaeus pipixcan* adulte en plumage nuptial a été observée le 8 mai 2011 sur la lagune Sakumono, au Ghana. C'est la première donnée pour le pays, d'une espèce qui, en Afrique de l'Ouest, n'avait été rapportée que de la Mauritanie et la Sénégalie.

In the late morning of 8 May 2011 we were birdwatching at Sakumono Lagoon in coastal Ghana, scanning for waders, gulls and terns, and hoping for some late migrants. A selection of commoner waterbirds was present, but nothing unexpected. While DF was scanning the lagoon one final time with binoculars, an adult Franklin's Gull *Leucophaeus pipixcan* in full breeding plumage flew into his field of view. Being familiar with the species from elsewhere in the world, this distinctive gull presented no identification challenge to DF. We were both able to follow it in our telescopes as it flew west along the edge of the lagoon, parallel to the coast, before landing out of view. We jumped in our car and drove to get closer. JN relocated it immediately, in a lagoon with Common Greenshanks *Tringa nebularia* and Black-tailed Godwits *Limosa limosa*. DF tried to digiscope it, but as the bird was rather distant and conditions were quite hazy, the results were poor. However, DF did obtain some adequate video footage. After a while, the bird took off and flew right past us giving excellent views, then over the road and out to sea. It was not seen again.

DF took the following description immediately after the observation: 'Medium-sized gull. Full

black hood with broad white eye-lids. Shortish red bill. White below with a faint pinkish flush to the breast. Medium-grey mantle and wings (paler than in Laughing Gull *L. atricilla*). In flight, broad white trailing edge to wing formed by white tips to secondaries and inner primaries. Narrow white tips to outer primaries, black subterminal band across outer 4–5 primaries, broad white band between black on wingtips and grey of wing (*contra* Laughing Gull, in which black on the primaries is extensive and there is no white between the black and the grey of the wing). Tail pure white, therefore a full adult.'

A very poor digiscoped image was seen by the editors, but is not suitable for reproduction. A copy of the video, which shows more detail, has been archived at the Natural History Museum, Tring, UK.

Franklin's Gull breeds exclusively in North America and is a long-distance migrant that winters in South America as far south as Chile and Argentina (Malling Olson & Larsson 2003). In West Africa, it has been recorded in coastal Mauritania and Senegambia, but there are no previous records for Ghana (Borrow & Demey 2014, Dowsett-Lemaire & Dowsett 2014). In southern Africa, there are records on the coast, from Walvis Bay, Namibia, where it has been present almost annually since the 1990s, to Lake St. Lucia, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, mostly in the northern winter (Hockey *et al.* 2005). Birds that successfully winter in South Africa perhaps migrate north in the boreal spring through other parts of Africa. In winter 2010–11, there were several records in South Africa (per T. Hardaker, sa-rarebirdnews@googlegroups.com) and there were a number of sightings elsewhere on the continent during the first half of 2011, including Libya on 1 February (Bourass *et al.* 2013), Egypt on 12 March (Jiguet *et al.* 2012) and Uganda on 8 June (J. Rossouw *in Bull. ABC* 19: 108).



Figure 1. Franklin's Gull / Mouette de Franklin *Leucophaeus pipixcan*, Sakumono Lagoon, Ghana, 8 May 2011 (David Fisher)

While undoubtedly a rarity in Africa, Franklin's Gull could occur as a vagrant anywhere on the continent and those inclined to study gull flocks on a regular basis should be aware of the possibility.

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